
Sunday 24th May 2020 – Easter 7

Readings: Ezekiel 36:24-28 & John 17:1-11

Ezekiel 36:24-28

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

John 17:1-11

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.”

Reflection

It's always an interesting moment when you see the Lectionary readings for the Sunday you are usually meant to preach from at 9am. Will it be the Old Testament or the New Testament that will draw my attention? Do they link together? What does God want me to say? When I saw the two readings were Ezekiel and John my immediate response was the new testament was most likely. How wrong I was; some interesting internal bias there. The essence of these verses in Ezekiel are so powerful. I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you, I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you.... I was rather taken aback. Of course I've read them before, but they hit home hard. And from Ezekiel, a book I've always liked, though it can be awkward to read. For me Ezekiel has a bit of an image problem, maybe the root of my bias. A new heart, a new spirit, a heart of flesh and his spirit, difficult to ignore. Yet really? Is it a credible idea?

Talking of credibility, I'm reading an interesting book at the moment "The Incredible Unlikelihood of Being" by Professor Alice Roberts, a well respected anatomist. Her central argument is that when you take into account all the evidence for how we have become human beings, it seems incredibly unlikely that we would come to be/exist at all. I agree, though not with her conclusion there is no supernatural guiding hand behind this. For me the (in)credibility issue raises exactly that question. Is it really credible that we as humans are just atoms and molecules come together over 14.5 billion years to form the amazing beings that we are. I'm sure Alice and I won't agree on that, but we do agree that it is incredibly unlikely that we would exist as beings at all. The credibility issue again. Don't get me wrong evolution is the best evidence based explanation of how we came to be. But it doesn't fully answer the questions about the how we came to exist and certainly not why. Yet we exist. We have being. Incredible.

Ezekiel's prophecy to the nation of Israel, is an analogy with humans, human beings. On the face of it his description of a new heart of flesh, and spirit, and God's spirit does seem to lack credibility. They seem an incredible description of the Christian life and power, yet they are the experience of so many of us. And if this newness of flesh and spirit seems to lack credibility, so does the fact that we exist at all. Yet we do. Ask Alice.

Credibility gaps overcome by a mixture of evidence, experience and belief, the 3 pillars of my faith. There's some deep wisdom in the old testament my unconscious bias would do well to override. Oh, and I'm liking the Lectionary more and more.

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